DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 249 841 HE 017 727

AUTHOR Tangri, Sandra S.
TITLE The Women's Lifepaths Study: The Course of Role-Innovation over 14 Years.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (Toronto, Canada, August 24-28, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Choice; *Employment Experience; *Family Life; *Females; *Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; Longitudinal Studies; *Nontraditional Occupations; Occupational Aspiration; Vocational Followup

ABSTRACT

Results of a longitudinal study of career development and associated life changes are reported for a sample of women in the Michigan Student Study. Data were collected in 1967, 1970, and 1981. The sample was stratified according to the traditionality of the occupation that the women said they intended to enter. "Traditionality" was defined in terms of the proportion of women in the occupation. One-third were role "innovators" who chose occupations in which women were represented at less than their proportion in the civilian labor force (30 percent). One-third were "traditionals" who chose occupations in which women constituted more than half of the labor force. And one-third were "moderates" who chose occupations in which the work force was between 20 and 50 percent female. Findings include the following: women who were role-innovators in 1981 had achieved higher levels of education and showed many of the work-related characteristics of the 1967 role-innovators (i.e., with respect to employment, salary, career progress, job characteristics, and job difficulties). For role-innovators, there was strong continuity and carrying out of intentions with respect both to occupational plans and to marital and family plans. (SW)

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THE WOMEN'S LIFEPATHS STUDY:

THE COURSE OF ROLE-INNOVATION OVER 14 YEARS*

Sandra S. Tangri
Howard University

This symposium reports results from a longitudinal study of career development and associated life changes for a sample of women in the Michigan Student Study who graduated from college in 1967 and were studied in 1967, 1970, and 1981. The original random sample consisted of 200 women in their senior year at college, stratified according to the traditionality of the occupation that they said they intended to enter. Traditionality was defined in terms of the proportion of women in the occupation. One-third were Role-Innovators who chose occupations in which women were represented at less than their proportion in the experienced civilian labor force: 30 percent. One-third were Traditionals who chose occupations in which women constituted more than half of the labor force. And one-third were Moderates who chose occupations in which the workforce was between 30 and 50 percent female.

The second wave of data was collected in 1970 on 152 women (76 percent of the original sample), who remained fairly equally distributed across the three original strata (50 Role-Innovators, 48 Moderates, and 54 Traditionals). These data cover their experiences in further education, employment, marriage, childbearing, and their feelings about each of these areas. Additional information was gathered to test more systematically inferences made earlier about role-modeling of and identification with parents, mentoring relationships at college, attitudes toward the women's movement, and aspirations for the future. At this time (1970) there was a general reduction in the level of Role-Innovation for the sample as a whole, associated with early family formation. However, their plans for the future, if carried out, indicated that this trend would be reversed.

The third wave of data was collected in 1981 on 117 of these same women, then age 36, covering their education, work, marital, and fertility history and future plans; TAT stories; dates of critical life events; friendships; mentor relationships; and organizational involvements. This number represents 77 percent of the 1970 sample and 58.5 percent of the 1967 sample. Again the distribution across the original strata remains good: 37 Role-Innovators, 38 Moderates, and 42 Traditionals.

HE 017 727

* Paper presented at the 1984 American Psychological Association Meetings in Toronto, Canada.

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The most interesting finding in 1981 is that the implied reversal of the 1970 trend has indeed taken place. Therefore there is greater continuity in Role-Innovation between 1967 and 1981 than between 1970 and 1981. And the greatest continuity is among the original Role-Innovators: 81 percent of them are in fact working in male-dominated fields in 1981, compared to 68 percent of the Traditionals who remain Traditional, and 34 percent of the Moderates who remain Moderate. Secondly, what they said in 1967 and again in 1970 regarding their commitment to working as a lifestyle is very strongly predictive of what in fact they turn out to be doing in 1981. Thus, the Role-Innovators in 1967 expressed the strongest commitment to continuing work after marriage and childbearing and they have the highest proportion of people in 1981 with an uninterrupted work pattern. In part, the greater persistence among the Role-Innovators is part of a general trend in the 1981 data for more women to be employed than expected to be. In 1967, only a minority of the sample (mostly the Role-Innovators) expected to continue working after marriage and childbearing. But in 1981 we find three-fourths of the sample are employed, 71 percent of those are employed full-time.

Descriptively, the Role-Innovators in 1981 have a lot of the characteristics that one would expect of Role-Innovators. They have had more career progressions, that is, more promotions or more changes of jobs that have led to higher status. They are making more money. They are more likely to be in the top half of their work organizations. They are more likely to have predominantly male colleagues. They are more likely to be pioneers, meaning that they are the first woman or one of the first women to hold the job that they hold in that organization. They are also more likely to have had difficulties in the work world because of being a woman, including sex discrimination and sexual harassment. About 30 percent of the entire sample have experienced sexual harassment, but it is reported most frequently by Role-Innovators and Moderates.

In terms of marriage and children there is again a surprising amount of predictiveness between what the women said in 1967 and what they actually did, both in terms of when they said they wanted to get married, when they wanted to have children, and how many children they wanted to have. In 1967 the Role-Innovators wanted to marry later, wanted to start having children later, and wanted to have fewer children. In 1981 we find that on the average they did marry later, started their families later, and have had fewer children. Thus it is clear that asking women about their life plans yields good predictors of future behavior. These expectations and plans should be taken seriously, since women do exercise this kind of control and strategizing about their future.

One of the most interesting questions that we asked in 1967 and repeated in 1970 and 1981 was how much conflict did they feel over wanting to have a career and combining it with

marriage (of course almost everyone said in 1967 that they wanted to get married). The level of conflict expressed increased dramatically over the fourteen years. In 1967, only one-fifth of the sample said that they felt there was a conflict between wanting a career and being married. In 1970, one-third of the sample said that they felt such conflict. In 1981, one-half of the sample said that they thought there would be conflict. In addition to this overall trend, there are significant differences between the groups on this variable. In 1967 the Role-Innovators anticipated the most conflict, the Traditionals anticipated having the least conflict. But by 1981, there is not a significant difference between the three original groups.

Even more interestingly, when we looked at predictors of 1981 Role-Innovation, the amount of conflict they expressed in 1967 is one of the strongest positive predictors. Having anticipated that there would be conflict between marriage and career, is strongly related to actually becoming a Role-Innovator in 1981. It does not appear to be a deterrent to achieving that goal. In fact, other data suggest that anticipating the conflict leads to behavioral strategies to cope with that conflict. Thus the Role-Innovators, who were highest in conflict in 1967, tended to marry later, have children later, and to have fewer children, all of which tends to minimize the actual conflict that they would have to handle. By 1981, the relationship between Role-Innovation and current feelings of conflict is reversed: 1981 Role-Innovators report the least conflict, while Traditionals report the most. The implication of these findings is that, if we are interested in helping women to diversify their adult roles, we need to encourage them to think ahead about the problems they are likely to encounter, and to plan accordingly.

Thus, timing of marriage and children, and the number of children one has are one kind of coping strategy. Another has to do with who one marries and his attitude toward his wife's career. We find that the women whose husbands had the most supportive attitudes toward their career were most likely to be Role-Innovators in 1981.

The original Role-Innovators also report having had more mentoring from faculty while in college and subsequently. They are more likely to have had male mentors than female mentors -- of course, they were in majors where the faculty was predominantly male. Traditionals on the other hand were more likely to have had female mentors in college. And the 1967 Role-Innovators were more likely to report that they had social contacts with their male professors, that is contacts outside of class-related activities. One of the most striking changes in our data is the difference in the correlation between this aspect of mentoring and 1967 Role-Innovation, and its correlation with 1981 Role-Innovation. Whereas having social contact with one's male professors was positively related to Role-Innovation in 1967, it is negatively related to Role-Innovation in 1981. This

is not the case for social contacts with female professors nor is it the case with social contacts with teaching fellows. One possible interpretation is that more social contacts with male professors may be to some extent sexual. And whereas that may happen more frequently to high-aspiring students while in college, it is not helpful to actually carrying out those aspirations. In a more positive vein one could say that keeping the mentor relationship with a male professor more professional and less personal, perhaps even less sexual, is more conducive to Role-Innovation in the long run.

1981 Role-Innovation

Women who are Role-Innovators in 1981 have achieved higher levels of education and show many of the work-related characteristics of the 1967 Role-Innovators (i.e., with respect to employment, salary, career progress, job characteristics, and job difficulties). Sixty-seven percent of the 1981 Role-Innovators are married, compared to 88 percent of the Traditionals. The Traditionals have the highest percentage of currently married and ever married. The 1981 Role-Innovators have had fewer children and started their families later. They have more supportive husbands, both in reported attitudes towards wife's career and in actual behavior. The 1981 Role-Innovators' partners are sharing more of the household tasks, and they may also have more paid help. Among the single Role-Innovators in 1981, we find them doing fewer of the female-type chores (ironing, washing, cooking) and more of the masculine-type chores (washing the car, outdoor maintenance, doing income taxes).

In conclusion there is strong continuity and carrying out of intentions with respect both to occupational plans and to marital and family plans. Secondly, anticipating conflict is not necessarily a deterrent to Role-Innovation ultimately. It in fact leads to better coping strategies that focus on the timing of marriage and childbearing and on the type of husband that one marries. Third, mentoring plays a significant role in actualizing Role-Innovative aspirations, and this result is associated with limiting this relationship to a professional one only.